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AUTHOR Finder, Morris
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ABSTRACT

This paper explains the need for pluralism as a principle by which to bring reason and order to the complicated field of curriculum. Pluralism implies that a function of the curriculum specialist is to uncover the assumptions and analyze the arguments of curricular statements. In exemplifying such a process of analysis, the paper has shown that objectives cannot be understood and communicated apart from the process through which they have been evolved; that as the first principle of teaching, instructional objectives are useful even in the creative and constructive arts; and that the principles of teaching are the criteria for evaluating a teacher. (Author)

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Morris Finder
School of Education - 109
State University of New York at Albany
Albany, New York 12222

RATIONAL SOLUTIONS TO CURRICULAR ISSUES

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Curricular inquiry, I assume, is intended to increase clarity and reason in educational thought and practice. Ideally, then, clarity and reason characterize the field of curriculum. I have been struck, however, by what I take to be a need for increased reason in three curricular areas: (1) the pluralistic nature of the field, (2) recent problems of objectives, and (3) recent problems of evaluation. I shall discuss these one by one.

The pluralistic nature of the field

I take curricular inquiry to mean any reasoned and systematic discourse about the ends, means, and consequences of instruction. In this section, I shall argue that attempts to formulate an all-encompassing curricular theory imply a unity that cannot be sustained by the nature of curricular inquiry.

When a field includes a large number of aspects or dimensions as curriculum does, it is accessible to a large number of investigative methods. The practice of using discrete methods to study different aspects of a thing has traditionally been called pluralism. A novel, for example, has a historical aspect and so it may be studied as a reflection of the time in which it was written. A novel, further, has the property of affecting readers and so it may be studied as a means to such an end. In addition, a novel may be conceived as an index of the imaginative and intellectual powers of its author, as a social, moral, and religious influence, and so on. Each of these aspects implies the use of investigative methods (historical, psychological, etc.) suited to the knowledge sought. This conception of pluralism has been developed from the argument that novels possess so many dimensions

EA 007 184

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that there can be no single overarching theory of literary criticism that can guide inquiry into all the complexity of fiction.[2]

Similarly, a curriculum or a curricular issue is at least as complicated as a novel; therefore, curriculum is accessible also to an uncertain number of discrete investigative methods. As illustration, I shall cite only three large classes into which one may group certain studies and methods appropriate to curricular inquiry.

One class, historical, includes explanations of how curriculums reflect or respond to particular times and conditions. Cremin's book, The Transformation of the School, is an example.

A second class, sociological, explains how curriculums affect and are affected by societies and social groups. An example is Allison Davis' little book, Social Class Influences Upon Learning.

Finally, a third class, constructional, is the kind that curriculum specialists deem most distinctively curricular. Studies in this class present criteria for justifying, planning, and evaluating curriculums and instructional plans, and may be exemplified by Tyler's Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction.

These three classes do not comprise an exhaustive list: Any kind of study is curricular to the extent that it bears upon problems of objectives and instructional planning. If, then, the field is to deal adequately and explicitly with its concerns, there must be a variety of methods to correspond to its variety of problems. It follows that curriculum is a pluralistic field, which explains the futility and the failures of attempts to formulate a single monolithic curricular theory. Put another way, pluralism offers a conceptual framework with which to conceive problems of curriculum and instruction in all their variety and complexity.

The need for pluralism, however, does not imply that any and all investigative methods, rationales, and models are equally acceptable. The canons of logic, coherence, and rationality apply to curriculum as they do to any reputable field.

In this view, a curriculum specialist has an analytical and critical function: examining writings and other statements to uncover their assumptions, the problems to which they are addressed, the terms and distinctions used in the discourse, and the influence of the discourse as a whole upon its statements and solutions. This function is exemplified, in part at least, in the discussion that follows.

Recent problems of objectives

Some recent work on objectives has been unfortunate. As one example, I cite W. James Popham's Instructional Objectives Exchange, sometimes called IOX. It has been called a bank of objectives. In this enterprise, statements of objectives are solicited, collected, classified, and distributed to school districts or similar educational agencies upon their request. Evaluation items that are related to the objectives are included in the material distributed.

The Instructional Objectives Exchange is justified by the following argument: "Teachers are already too burdened to find the time to develop operationally stated objectives for their classes. School districts have already increased their increasingly limited resources to other tasks."[3]

While Professor Popham is right in implying that teaching unguided by purpose does occur, these failures in teacher education and supervision cannot be overcome by withdrawals from a bank of objectives. And even if the selection of other people's objectives could compensate for such failure,

the procedures are illegitimate. They are illegitimate because of the hidden assumption that teachers are not to be autonomous professionals but, rather, mere functionaries. Further, the scheme is unworkable and notions that it does work are probably delusions. An explanation follows.

It is unreasonable to suppose that objectives developed in School X will be understood and useful in School Y. If the objectives developed in School X mean anything there, these have been derived as a result of a particular discussion. To talk about objectives apart from the discussion through which they have been derived is to talk about them as vague and fuzzy notions. What a set of instructional objectives means can be discovered only by relating it to the context of the discussion through which it has been evolved. This relationship between the discussion and the resulting objectives holds whether the objectives have been derived by an individual or by a group. Anyone can verify this contention by presenting already developed objectives to someone unfamiliar to these and asking what they mean.

Nor can we expect clarification by examining the related evaluation items. No one, for example, is likely to understand my objectives for teaching the comprehension of poetry unless he understands my particular uses of particular terms: Suppose I cite as an objective the student's ability to "Identify the purpose in a lyric poem." Then suppose that I present as a related evaluation item a lyric poem with the direction, "Identify the purpose in this poem." Unless the IOX subscriber had access to the rather complicated discussion that lay behind the objective, he could not know what the objective means, because he doesn't know what I take "purpose" to mean and imply.

Referring to ascertaining the meanings of words in contexts, the late critic R.S. Crane explains that

> To talk about [terms and distinctions] in separation from the particular activity of reasoning by which they are ordered and defined in philosophic discourse is to talk about them...as indeterminate in meaning as the hundred or so "great ideas" that Mortimer Adler has assembled... in his Syntopicon.[4]

Although there are differences between a curriculum and a philosophical discourse, both are susceptible to the separation of terms and statements from their context. And this explains, at least partly, why a bank of objectives or a bank of evaluative exercises has little likelihood of achieving its intention.

Further, both experience and research with groups point to the conclusion that the process of deriving objectives is at least as important as the objectives derived. The thinking behind the IOX, however, is quite different. That enterprise seems to be concerned with what Professor Popham calls the reinventing of the wheel:

> ...more than a year after the Clark County, Nevada schools had completed their preparation of K-6 instructional objectives for mathematics, two districts in different states commenced work on precisely the same project, unaware of the Clark County objectives. The wheel was about to be re-invented.[5]

The IOX, then, is justified on the assumption that teachers are too busy or too stupid to formulate their own objectives and also stupid enough yet not busy enough to select objectives written by other people, for other students, in other circumstances, all through a discussion in which the selecting teachers have not participated and about which they have not been informed.

Borrowed objectives are of dubious value because only those who develop them understand them and are likely to be psychologically committed to them. The need, therefore, is to educate teachers so that they understand the powers of the first principle of teaching.

The first principle of teaching, like the first principle of anything else, is the purpose. In teaching, it is the instructional objective. If teachers cannot learn to infer and then formulate objectives in some manner, there can be no rational education of teachers and no rational teaching.

Professor Popham is a specialist in the education of teachers. He has produced materials intended to teach how to formulate objectives. If the distribution of materials can help solve the problem, it would be preferable to distribute materials for teaching the importance of objectives and procedures by which to formulate these.

Still other problems caused by misunderstanding the nature of objectives are revealed, unknowingly, in an article by Elliot W. Eisner.[6] Part of this article presents a rationalization for ignoring or maintaining vagueness about the purposes to which any rational program of instruction is a means.

Professor Eisner argues that "educational objectives clearly and specifically stated can hamper as well as help the ends of instruction and ...an unexamined belief in curriculum as in other domains of human activity can easily become dogma which in fact may hinder the very functions the concept was originally designed to serve."[7]

The argument calls for examination. First, the notion that clear objectives can hamper instruction is a statement neither of theory nor of systematic observation. It may be an observation of human behavior, perhaps only subjectively verified. Second, the argument is based on the dubious

assumption that the teacher's grasp of the principles of instruction are so nebulous and inchoate that their explicit knowledge of purpose hinders their achieving it. Third, if teachers really do exhibit such a nebulous grasp, that is no reason to suppose that ignorance of ends is prerequisite to their success. And, further, there is no reason to suppose that educators of teachers ought to be concerned with protecting the teacher from acquiring overt knowledge of the ends to which his work is a means. Such protection is a consequence of the argument being examined.

Fourth, to equate instructional objectives with dogma and unexamined belief is to confuse dogma and unexamined belief with first principles.

A curriculum specialist in his function as a teacher, one would suppose, is obligated to teach the curricular principles so that they work in the everyday world. The flight from principles is a flight from freedom and reason. In this view, such a flight is a pathology to be overcome. In the article to which I refer, however, the flight from principles is to be accommodated and fostered. On this point, Professor Eisner makes the following incredible statement: "If educational objectives were really useful tools, teachers I submit, would use them. If they do not, perhaps it is not because there is something wrong with the teachers but because there might be something wrong with the theory."[8]

Now the only way to discredit a theory is to prove on logical and empirical grounds that it is false. The theory that objectives are the first principle of curriculum and instruction rests on unassailable logical grounds. If, therefore, a teacher finds knowledge of ends to be a hindrance, the fault hardly lies with the theory. Rather, the fault lies with the preparation or the supervision of the teacher, or from some other cause or combination of these.

Moreover, in explaining how instructional objectives came about, Professor Eisner begins with this question: "When and where did beliefs concerning the importance of educational objectives in curriculum development emerge?" He then answers that this "belief" began "around the turn of the century with the birth of the scientific movement in education."[9]

Again a confusion between a belief and a first principle. And along with this, some dubious history. The principle that instructional objectives are a causal necessity for a rational program of instruction has been established at least as early as Aristotle's formulation of the four causes. Therefore any serious and systematic discussion of education from at least Aristotle's day must have taken into account this notion of ends. Later writers on the curriculum either borrowed or rediscovered this fundamental principle. However all this may be, a discussion of means without reference to ends is by definition an absurdity.

Some of Professor Eisner's argument rests on the familiar notion that performance in mathematics or similar subjects is more readily identified and evaluated than performance in the creative arts and that a curricular theory must account for that. The extent of precision in a field, however, is not a matter of curricular theory; it is, rather, a matter of the field itself. A given subject, Aristotle explains, is accessible to a degree of precision proper to it.[10] It follows, then, that statements of objectives ideally reflect the degree of precision that the subject matter permits.

Although the arts are accessible to less precision than the sciences are, the arts do permit a level of precision that can usefully guide teaching. The skills of expository writing, for example, may be identified by analyzing the structure of written discourse and inferring what it is

that writers do, consciously or unconsciously, in producing such writings. The skills thus inferred comprise a comprehensive and coherent set.[11] I can think of no more rational basis for teaching to write than such a set of skills. Further, those skills furnish the valid basis for the evaluation of writing.

It is noteworthy that when properly identified, the skills of writing make explicit the principles of construction and these are put to use consciously or unconsciously by all writers of expository prose, on all topics, at all levels of maturity, at all degrees of creativity. The principles or objectives for guiding other creative efforts may be derived also by inferring the principles by which paintings, sculptures, and stories are constructed. Such objectives provide a basis for intelligent and flexible instruction.

Recent problems of evaluation

Not only have objectives given rise to issues and problems but so has evaluation, particularly the evaluation of teaching and teachers. The typical, uncritical acceptance of the terms "student evaluation," "student evaluation form," and "peer evaluation" is a sign of an apparent inability or unwillingness to distinguish evaluation from opinion. It is perhaps enough to say that when opinion becomes the criterion of assessment, it is opinion rather than principle that will tend to guide the work of the teacher.

Another kind of misevaluation of teachers is provided, unfortunately, by another project of Professor Popham's, his "Performance Test of Teaching Proficiency."[12] Although he makes no particular claims for the value of his performance test, it is fair to question its legitimacy.

Is it legitimate to evaluate a teacher on a basis of performance, that is on whether his students have learned what he intended them to learn? The answer is no because it can be shown that outward success is not the criterion

for judging an art. Aristotle explains why in his description of the rhetorician's task:

> It is clear that [the function of rhetoric] is not simply to succeed in persuading, but rather to discover the means of coming as near such success as the circumstances of each particular case allow. In this it resembles all other arts. For example, it is not the function of medicine simply to make a man quite healthy, but to put him as far as may be on the road to health; it is possible to give excellent treatment even to those who can never enjoy sound health.[13]

Put another way, the proper basis for evaluating the practitioner of an art, of which teaching is an example, is use of proper principles.[14]

There is still another reason why the principles rather than examples of success provide the proper basis of evaluation: Particular school settings and particular students are so complicated that they are not accessible to systematic and scientific knowledge. Aristotle puts it like this:

> ...none of the arts theorize about individual cases. Medicine, for instance, does not theorize about what will help to cure Socrates or Callias, but only about what will help to cure any or all of a given class of patients: this alone is its business: individual cases are so infinitely various that no systematic knowledge of them is possible.[15]

Perhaps this is enough to explain the invalidity of a performance test to evaluate teaching. It may explain, too, why so-called performance-based certification, if taken literally, rests on dubious theoretical grounds.

Finally, none of this denies that consistently high student achievement of valued ends is an ultimate criterion of a teacher's success. There is a difference, however, between an ultimate criterion and a proper criterion. For the reasons given, the use of right principles may be proposed as the proper and valid basis for evaluating a teacher.

Summary

This paper has explained the need for pluralism as a principle by which to bring reason and order to the complicated field of curriculum. Pluralism implies that a function of the curriculum specialist is to uncover the assumptions and analyze the arguments of curricular statements. In exemplifying such a process of analysis, the paper has shown that objectives cannot be understood and communicated apart from the process through which they have been evolved; that as the first principle of teaching, instructional objectives are useful even in the creative and constructive arts; and that the principles of teaching are the criteria for evaluating a teacher.

NOTES

[1] Revised version of a talk presented to a session at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association on April 2, 1975, in Washington, D.C.

[2] Elder Olson, "The Dialectical Foundations of Critical Pluralism," Texas Quarterly 9 (1966), pp. 202-230.

[3] W. James Popham, "The Instructional Objectives Exchange: New Support for Criterion-Referenced Instruction," Phi Delta Kappan, LII, No. 3 (November, 1970), p. 174.

[4] R.S. Crane, "Philosophy, Literature, and the History of Ideas," The Idea of the Humanities and Other Essays Critical and Historical, Vol. I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 181.

[5] Popham, op. cit., p. 175.

[6] Elliot W. Eisner, "Instructional Objectives: Help or Hindrance?" School Review 75, No. 4 (Autumn, 1967), pp. 250-260.

[7] Ibid., p. 250.

[8] Ibid., p. 253.

[9] Ibid., pp. 250-251.

[10] Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics 1.1094 iii.1-30

[11] Morris Finder, "Reading and Writing Exposition and Argument: The Skills and Their Relationships," English Journal 60, No. 5 (May, 1971), pp. 615-620.

NOTES cont'd.

[12] W. James Popham, "The Performance Test: A New Approach to the Assessment of Teaching Proficiency," The Journal of Teacher Education 19, No. 2 (Summer, 1968), pp. 216-222.

_____, "Performance Tests of Teaching Proficiency: Rationale, Development, and Validation," American Educational Research Journal 8, No. 1 (January, 1971), pp. 105-117.

[13] Aristotle Rhetoric 1.1355^{b} i.10

[14] An explicit formulation of the principles of teaching appears in Morris Finder, "Competence and the Methods Course," English Education 6, No. 1 (October-November, 1974), pp. 40-42.

[15] Aristotle Rhetoric 1.1356^{b} ii.30